Targeting Statues: Monument "Vandalism" as an Expression of Sociopolitical Protest in South Africa

Sabine Marschall

Abstract: Inspired by the "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign, this article examines the defacement of statues and commemorative monuments in postapartheid South Africa. The term "vandalism" is problematized and, based on observation, site visits, and media reports, various cases of statue defacement are then discussed. Local events are contextualized in relation to selected postcolonial societies in Africa and other comparative international contexts. The article argues that political discontent is not necessarily expressed in overt acts of ideologically motivated vandalism, but can manifest itself equally in acts of neglect, disrespect, silence, and disengagement.

Résumé: Inspiré par la campagne "Rhodes doit tomber," cet article examine la dégradation des sculptures et des monuments commémoratifs en Afrique du Sud postapartheid basé sur des observations, des visites de sites et de rapports médiatiques. Il interroge le terme "vandalisme" et met en contexte les événements locaux en fonction des sociétés africaines postcoloniales sélectionnées et des contextes comparatifs internationaux. Il fait valoir que le mécontentement politique n'est pas nécessairement exprimé dans des actes manifestes de vandalisme motivé par une idéologie, mais qu'il peut également se manifester dans les actes de négligence, de manque de respect, de silence et de désengagement.

Keywords: Monuments; statues; dissent; heritage; vandalism; symbols; South Africa

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Introduction

Two contrasting notions about monuments, eloquently captured by Robert Musil and Michael Taussig, respectively, may be said to sum up the paradoxical nature of the public commemorative marker. On the one hand, monuments, according to Musil (1936), are intended to be seen and respected, and to attract attention, but in reality they are utterly invisible, blending into their urban environment without anyone taking notice, even "repelling" attention. On the other hand, monuments, as Taussig suggests, virtually cry out "to be toppled, besmirched, desecrated," because public commemoration is based on selective remembering and strategic forgetting. The repressed history is always already installed in the statue—like a hidden flaw, awaiting to be revealed (1999:20–21). The more monumental, imposing, conceited the statue, the more alluring, inviting, beckoning it presumably becomes as a target for expressions of discontent in times of contestation and sociopolitical change.

This article focuses on the defacement of statues and commemorative monuments in postapartheid South Africa. It is inspired by the "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign initiated by students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in March 2015 and the acts of statue "vandalism" it sparked in various cities across the country during the following months. The "Statue Revolution 2015," as the Heritage Portal calls it (www.theheritageportal.co.za), resulted in vibrant debate about "white heritage" and symbols of the colonial and apartheid era. Government authorities and political leaders issued official statements, institutional committees and forums were established, and countless emotionally charged opinions were expressed by individuals and stakeholder groups across the country (Van Vollenhoven 2015). By the end of the year almost all was quiet again on the heritage front, as the public's attention quickly shifted to more current news and matters of higher priority.

Based on observations, site visits, and media reports collected over a period of fifteen years, this article aims to place these developments into a larger temporal and geographical perspective, beginning with a problematization of the term "vandalism" itself. This term—along with others such as "defacement," "damage," "destruction," "disfigurement," and "desecration"— carries negative connotations associated with violence, unlawfulness, disrespect, disobedience, and uncivilized behavior. Such terms describe the acts from the perspective of the enforcers of law and order and those concerned about conservation—of the monuments, and perhaps more broadly, of the prevailing order. Acts such as cutting a limb off a bronze statue, breaking pieces off a monument, scrawling graffiti or protest messages, or setting a monument on fire could also be described in terms such as "intervention," "modification," "alteration," "appropriation," "reinscription," "addition," or "rearrangement": in other words, terms that carry more positive connotations of innovation, creativity, and hope for change. If one views monument alteration as a cultural-political performance that highlights the crisis

and precariousness of an existing sociopolitical dispensation, then the very concept of "vandalism" becomes untenable.

However, for the purposes of this article, the concept of vandalism—including its legalistic meaning—and all the related terms are retained and used to describe the evidence. This use of terminology is not meant to suggest that law and order or the current status quo is preferable to revolutionary change, but rather to avoid implying that certain cases mentioned below enjoy more legitimacy than others. The intention of this article is not to judge the merit or misguidedness of any intervention or act of defacement, but to examine the popularity, efficiency, and power of the public commemorative monument as a canvas and focal point for the expression of social critique and political opposition in the specific South African context, and to some extent, in postcolonial Africa. The article hence investigates the politics of defacement and the different visual and performative forms it takes. This includes the treatment of commemorative artifacts as a canvas for "markers" of dissent (graffiti, paint splashes, damage, destruction, attachments of insulting items or substances); the use of a monument as a stage for the performance of protest (demonstrations, public gatherings, speeches, and ritualized symbolic actions); the prevention, through violent or discursive means, of the erection of newly cast statues; and the erection of counter-monuments or other types of additions. In fact, cases of "ideological vandalism" as defined by the sociologist Stanley Cohen (1973)—defacement of a symbolic object for the sake of conveying a political message—have been relatively rare in South Africa during the past two decades of democracy, despite the recent surge in activity. However, as this article will show, objection to specific monuments, general discontent with broader sociopolitical issues, and a spirit of resistance do not necessarily manifest themselves in any of these recognized forms of vandalism, but can equally be conveyed through silence, disengagement, disrespectful behavior, and neglect.

Detested Symbols or Cultural Heritage?

The term "vandalism" was first used in the context of the French Revolution with reference to the destruction of symbols of the *Ancien Régime*. Robespierre had argued that the destruction of the monarchy must be followed by the radical clearance of any signs of despotism from the spaces of the new republic. But by 1792 concerns emerged that the destructive dynamic was excessive and that many unique monuments, art objects, and cultural artifacts belonging to the nation's patrimony were being damaged, looted, or destroyed indiscriminately, and legal regulations were devised to protect the "national cultural heritage" (Bresnahan 2014). However, in a context of sociopolitical upheaval, the distinction between valuable cultural heritage that is worth conserving and detested symbols of the past that are worth destroying is inevitably contested and political. More than two hundred years later, there is still no consensus either nationally or internationally on how exactly to define the concept and especially the content of a cultural

heritage, particularly in legal terms (Blake 2014). In present-day South Africa, more than twenty years after the end of apartheid, there is a disjuncture between what the law defines and protects as part of the national estate and what large segments of the population consider worth preserving and celebrating as "our heritage."

The French Revolution set another important precedent with regard to the discussion of vandalism. As Bresnahan (2014:278) shows, "the rhetoric of 'vandalism' served to de-legitimate certain actors—and certain forms of spatial violence—from the narrative of the Revolution." Almost two hundred years later, Stanley Cohen (1971) argued that "vandalism" is first and foremost a matter of definition and discourse, which in any society reflects hegemonic notions of societal values and normative behavior. Describing the damaging of private or public property as "vandalism" frames the behavior as an act of criminal delinquency, besides evoking irrationality and barbarism. Such use of terminology may disguise political conflict or discredit civil society discontent, especially, one may add, in sociopolitical contexts of great inequality, poverty, and lack of opportunity for some.

In South Africa today, as in many other countries, the damage or defacement of public and private property, including monuments, is officially defined as an unlawful act, but there is little societal consensus on the validity of the law. Some groups view the attacks on monuments and contested symbols of the past as legitimate forms of expressing ideological difference and political discontent. Defacement of symbols is also discursively legitimated with reference to the celebrated historical precedents of anti-apartheid protest action and presented as a valid means of attaining a worthy cause—transformation or revolution—where peaceful attempts are perceived to have failed. The law that defines such acts as vandalism is seen as an instrument of political oppression reflecting the interests of conservative forces intent on protecting the status quo (see also Ampofo 2016).

Cultural heritage is formally defined in various legal and policy instruments (e.g., the National Heritage Resources Act [NHRA] 1999), but inherent in any such definition are value judgments, active choices, and the assumption of societal consensus. Even within official heritage authorities and the government, much uncertainty and contestation remains about which traces of the past are "significant" and which aspects of cultural heritage, including the intangible cultural heritage, deserve protection and conservation. Various scholars have grappled with the notion of cultural heritage and pointed out its contested and contradictory nature. Cultural heritage is both a symbol reflecting group identity and an instrument in forging such identity. It can simultaneously cause social cohesion and deep societal division, even violent conflict, in which the destruction of monuments is used as a weapon of war. In that sense, cultural heritage is "less a substance than a quality" (Knoop 1995, cited in Blake 2014:84). Beyond their material existence, historical relics carry an emotional impact; the colonial architecture in India, for example, "may inspire a sense of familiarity and even pride in a British visitor while providing a source of offence to many Indians" (Blake 2014:844).

The distinction between substance and quality is important when trying to understand the emotional outbursts of those outraged by the vandalism against "their" monuments and the deep-seated anger that drives others to unleash violence against statues. What is at stake is not necessarily the substance or content of a public monument (i.e., identification with or objection to the specific historical figure or commemorated event) but the quality (i.e., the added value, the general set of values and meanings) associated with it. This explains, for example, why members of the white community can be livid about the defacement of a particular statue while asserting that they do not identify with the deeds and symbolic significance of the hero it represents. By the same token, others vandalize monuments erected during the apartheid period without knowing who the commemorated person was, what that individual did, and what the memorial is meant to symbolize.

In trying to understand the psychology of vandalism, some scholars have drawn attention to the "destructive joy" (Sande 2014:173) produced by acts of defacement and iconoclasm and "the human pleasure in destroying the goods of real or imagined enemies" (Braavig 2014:154). Cohen (1973) calls acts of damage and desecration for the sake of taking revenge "vindictive vandalism." According to this point of view, the perpetrators choose their target not necessarily on the basis of political opposition to the specific person represented, but because they know that the monument is cherished by a real or perceived enemy. The vandalism is carried out to cause maximum emotional hurt in retaliation for intentional or structurally embedded suffering caused by the enemy.[1]

South Africa from an International Perspective

In the extensive debate about monuments (as manifested in public discussion forums organized by institutions, radio call-in programs, television shows, newspaper reports and opinion pieces, and the deluge of comments in various online media platforms), some important international comparisons are frequently drawn. We are reminded that in post-Nazi Germany, post-Soviet Russia, postcommunist Eastern Europe, and postcolonial societies in Africa and Asia, symbols of the previous era were radically cleared from the public domain with the advent of the new democratic order. The continued presence of colonial statues and apartheid-era monuments in South Africa is hence represented as an anomaly that requires immediate redress (see, e.g., Schutte 2015).

It is indeed true that a radical change of a country's political landscape usually results in a major change of the symbolic landscape, especially the removal (and replacement) of statues and commemorative monuments in prominent public spaces. What is commonly overlooked is that postapartheid South Africa differs fundamentally from post-Nazi Germany, postcommunist Europe, and other postcolonial societies because of the unique sociopolitical circumstances of its emergence. The end of the apartheid regime

and its replacement with a multiracial democracy was the result of negotiation and a peaceful settlement, not a military victory or popular revolution. The country's memory landscape is a direct reflection of these historical circumstances. Respect for existing commemorative monuments, cultural heritage sites, and real or perceived identity symbols of the white minority was one of many compromises that were struck during these negotiations and strongly endorsed by President Nelson Mandela for the sake of reconciliation and national unity during the transition period that followed (Marschall 2010a).

There are strong sentiments in South Africa today that after two decades of democracy, it is time to renegotiate these compromises and adjust South Africa's symbolic landscape accordingly. However, radical measures affecting the white minority invariably have an impact on the West's perception of South Africa, with potentially negative consequences in terms of international investment at a time when the local economy is under tremendous pressure. Internally, a change of the current heritage legislation and policy on cultural symbols may open the proverbial can of worms, as many other compromises of the "first hour" may equally become open for reconsideration, such as the controversial role of nonelected traditional leaders in a democratic government structure. In fact, the very Constitution might become subject to renegotiation, as a majority of South Africans appear not to identity with many of its liberal principles.

In addition, the common perception that formerly Soviet-dominated countries were subjected to a radical iconoclastic onslaught after the collapse of the Soviet Union is only partially correct. One can still find a good number of communist-era statues and monuments in Russia and other postcommunist nations, especially those too big and too expensive to remove. Many countries adopted a somewhat pragmatic approach, perhaps deferring a removal in light of other priorities. Similarly, in previously colonized nations in Africa and beyond, the eradication of colonial-era statues and monuments after independence often proceeded far more slowly, selectively, and unsystematically than commonly assumed. Some colonial statues have remained in place, such as that of Queen Victoria in Nairobi, which, according to Larsen (2012), is believed by many local people to represent the Virgin Mary. In a few countries (e.g., Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC]), government authorities even decided to re-erect selected colonial statues previously subjected to the iconoclastic fervor of the immediate postindependence period. Thus in some African countries the memory of the colonial past is being revisited and the presence of associated symbols renegotiated, influenced perhaps by the desire to create better economic and political relations with Western powers.

Such moves are not necessarily based on consultative decision-making and may themselves lead to a public outcry; in Kinshasa in 2005, for example, the authorities were forced to quickly remove the controversial statue of King Leopold II only hours after its re-erection (Lagae 2005). Nevertheless, these events illustrate the transient nature of the urban symbolic landscape

in postcolonial Africa. Indeed, several statues of African politicians, independence leaders, and freedom struggle heroes which once triumphantly replaced the discarded colonial icons have themselves been removed (sometimes violently) in the course of changing political leadership and ideological direction. Some of these disgraced African leaders were later rehabilitated and their statues once again accorded a place of honor in the urban landscape, as exemplified by the case of Kwame Nkrumah, Africa's first postcolonial president. Nkrumah statues, proudly erected following Ghana's independence in 1957, were vandalized and dismantled in the wake of the 1966 coup d'état. One of them, which was decapitated and had its left arm chopped off, was subsequently stored at the local museum in Accra. In the early 1990s Nkrumah was rehabilitated and new monuments erected in his honor. In 2010 the mutilated statue was re-installed in the public domain, with the head (retrieved from a private collector) positioned next to it and the statue's history explained in the accompanying display (Gavua 2015). Defaced statues can hence become memorials in their own right, with the traces of their disfigurement and mutilation adding a new layer of meaning that may even enhance the significance of its erstwhile rendition.

In South Africa it is also the case that most incidents of ideologically motivated defacement have been carried out not by defenders of the new postapartheid state but by white South Africans who feel themselves undervalued in the new political order. Under the aegis of the postapartheid government, many new commemorative monuments, memorials, statues, museums, and heritage sites honoring African leaders have been installed throughout the country, just as towns, landmarks, and streets have been renamed in honor of black heroes (Swanepoel 2012). These developments have inspired resistance and protest by those enraged by the perceived erasure, omission, and negation of white leaders and "white heritage" more generally—including self-professed white extremists such as the right-wing AWB (Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging, or Afrikaner Resistance Movement). It is mostly bronze statues—of liberation struggle heroes, African chiefs, and important African leader figures—that have been subjected to ideologically motivated defacement, usually entailing the writing of racist slogans and splashing of paint, often in the color scheme of the old South African flag (orange, white, and blue). Examples include the statue of Chief Tshwane in front of the Pretoria City Hall, which was repeatedly targeted; the Steve Biko statue in front of the city hall in East London; the Gert Sibande statue in Bethal; the King Makhado statue in Makhado (formerly Louis Trichardt); and similar statues of African chiefs in newly renamed municipalities (Weekend Post Reporters 1997; Sapa 1997, 2008; Nthite 2006; Hlatshwayo & SamaYende 2005).

For white extremists, who previously fought anti-apartheid activists they branded as "terrorists" and "communists," the loss of military power prompted a transfer of opposition to the political and symbolic level. What makes bronze statues particularly provocative is their mimetic character,

the realistically rendered bronze image being an idealized frozen likeness of the "enemy." Moreover, a bronze statue on a pedestal is a time-honored symbol of societal respect and admiration, and its location in front of a city hall or another place of importance and visibility is perceived as an affront and provocation. In Limpopo, part of the former Transvaal, where pockets of conservative Afrikaner farming communities resent the renaming of "their" town, the bronze effigies of the African chiefs are considered visual representations of the new name and associated with the obliteration of "white heritage" and the historical roots of the settlement.[2]

A different approach to the expression of white opposition to the public commemoration of black "freedom fighters" manifested itself in 2006–7 at Freedom Park, South Africa's premier "shrine of the nation" located on a hill at Salvokop outside Pretoria. The site's most significant point of contention has been its Wall of Names, which lists all those "who died for freedom" in the country's many wars and conflicts. In 2006 the Cuban government requested that Freedom Park reserve a place of honor for the Cuban veterans who died in the 1980s "bush war" in Angola, fighting alongside South African liberation forces. This prompted veterans of the former South African Defence Force (SADF) to demand that their compatriots who died in the same war, fighting for "freedom from communism," should also be listed on the Wall of Names. After much deliberation, the Freedom Park Trust decided to list the names of the Cubans but to exclude those of the SADF, as they were said to have fought for the ideology and political aims of the apartheid regime. After much protest, the outraged veterans installed a humble counter-memorial outside the gates of Freedom Park, unveiled in January 2007 by the prominent musician and self-declared custodian of Afrikaner culture, Steve Hofmeyr (Marschall 2010a). The simple pyramidal structure remained in place for several years until it was damaged in the course of a car accident (to the delight of the Freedom Park Trust) and subsequently removed.

"Rhodes Must Fall" and Its Spinoffs

On the other side of the political spectrum is the "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign and its spinoffs. On March 9, 2015, Chumani Maxwele, a student at UCT, flung human excrement at the statue of Cecil John Rhodes located on the university's upper campus, demanding the removal of this symbol of colonialism and the long-called-for transformation of the university. The "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign quickly inspired solidarity actions at other universities in South Africa and to some extent internationally (see, e.g., Petersen 2015).The Rhodes statue was removed on April 9, 2015, after a hasty debate, but during the following two months approximately twenty other statues and commemorative monuments were defaced in various cities across South Africa, especially Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth, and Pretoria. By May the "spate of vandalism," as it was often referred to in the media, had ebbed; a few more incidents occurred later that year but drew

little media attention. Most of the targets were highly visible bronze statues located in prominent spaces. The majority were defaced with splashes of paint and graffiti slogans; a few were damaged through violent, destructive action and a few others had protest posters attached.[3]

These defacements and interventions were mostly carried out clandestinely and anonymously, leaving the field wide open for speculation about agents and motivations, but the media often represented the dynamic as if all incidents were somehow connected, underpinned by the same motivation and part of a larger, homogenous force. The statue controversy was implicitly portrayed as a manifestation of a race-based conflict—black versus white—and sensationalist media sources even predicted that a race war was imminent (Chifamba 2015). The ensuing public debate about monuments erected during the predemocratic era, widely perceived to represent a supremacist white minority heritage and offensive racist values, revealed deep divisions about heritage, commonly shared values, and national identity.

It may be surprising to note that there were few incidents of overtly ideologically motivated defacement before the "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign. Exceptions include a strategic campaign organized by the *Tribute* magazine, a publication aimed largely at the black African market, to take a stand against "meaningless" monuments from the old South Africa. In October 1997 several statues in Johannesburg and Pretoria were swathed with black cloth, drawing some media attention (*The Star* 1997). In November 2000 a newspaper reported that Prescilla De Wet-Fox, who claimed to be the head-person of a Khoi-Khoi tribe in Oudtshoorn, damaged a bust of Jan van Riebeeck on behalf of the Khoi nation at the historical Castle in Cape Town, "embarrassing her hosts and VIP guests at a black-tie function to promote cultural diversity" (Schoonakker 2000). The Rhodes Memorial in Cape Town has been defaced a few times; in June 2001, for example, it was found splashed with red paint and strange slogans ("inkos ari" and "viva") were painted beneath the statue (Peer 2001).

What differentiates the recent series of statue defacements in the wake of the "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign from such previous cases is the increased frequency and similarity of incidents, fueled (probably inadvertently) by the media and deliberately by various political groupings, notably the radical left-wing Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) under the leadership of Julius Malema. Most cases of defacement were targeted at statues and involved the splashing of paint and scrawling of slogans, echoing the AWB attacks on effigies of black heroes. For the most part these actions occurred anonymously; in one case, a named individual, the human rights activist Suleiman Stellenboom, took responsibility for attaching placards with provocative statements to various statues in Cape Town (Bamford 2015). The EFF also acknowledged responsibility in a few cases or publicly praised the defacement, calling for the removal of all symbols of the past (see, e.g., Ferreira 2015) in what many suspected to be an opportunistic political move. One of the most destructive attacks on statues was staged in broad daylight

in Uitenhage by members of the EFF, who placed a burning tire around the statue of a white soldier that was part of a local war memorial, thereby mimicking the ghastly apartheid-era practice of "necklacing" (*Daily Vox* 2015).

Such actions express extreme anger and hatred, arguably enhanced, as in the attacks by the AWB, by the lifelike quality of the bronze effigies. As Taussig (1999) argues, attacking a statue resembles an act of mimetic magic, like sticking a needle in the heart of a figurine in order to kill the person thereby represented. Since the commemorated person is already dead, the mimetic action becomes a form of posthumous punishment of the despised, and an attempt at killing the legacy of the person's deeds and ideologies. A few other cases fall into the same category. The bust of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa in Durban shows evidence of having been knocked on the head (Payet 2015), and in a few cases paint was suggestively smeared on deliberately chosen body parts (e.g., Pessoa's face and Louis Botha's crotch on his statue in Durban). Perhaps it was precisely the fact that Maxwele desecrated the Rhodes statue not by besmirching it with paint but with human feces—a strategically chosen gesture of ultimate humiliation, evoking repugnance and disgust—that inspired this upping of the ante in the expression of dissent among his supporters.

"Black Monuments" Contested by Black Communities

Politically motivated ideological vandalism has manifested itself in postapartheid South Africa not only in what might be described (albeit reductively) as "white on black" and "black on white" actions, but also in those that could be considered "black on black." At the outset of the democratic era, the first acts of such vandalism carried out by black communities targeted the monuments and statues erected by former "homeland" leaders in an attempt at shoring up a Bantustan national identity. Some of these installations, however, not only remained intact but were even cherished, notably statues representing African chiefs, who were re-interpreted from "founding fathers" of the "homeland nation" to proud symbols of ethnic identity (e.g., the statue of King Shaka originally in front of the KwaZulu Legislature in Ulundi) or anticolonial resistance heroes (e.g., the Ndebele King Nyabela in Mpumalanga). But in other cases iconoclastic actions expressed the deep resentment and even hatred felt by members of these communities against their leaders and the concept of the Bantustan. The destructive violence of some of these incidents is epitomized by the vicious destruction of Ntaba ka Ndoda, the ambitious "national shrine" erected in 1981 by the homeland ruler Lennox Sebe on a hill near King Williams Town in the former Ciskei (Grant 1995).

As the postapartheid government settled in and installed an increasing number of statues and public monuments in honor of liberation struggle heroes, isolated cases of defacement occurred that were reasonably attributed to black communities. Although anonymous attacks on monuments

ultimately remain open to speculation, the context of some incidents suggested that they were carried out by black supporters of opposition parties or community members who held grudges against local authorities, especially over the lack of service delivery. In one case—in the East London township of Duncan Village, where a statue commemorating the 1985 Duncan Village Massacre was defaced—members of the local community affirmed that they were not targeting the existence of the statue per se, but were upset about not having been consulted over its design. Community protests were organized and the bronze statue was partially damaged, after which the authorities built a protective fence around it (Miti 2008; Mngxitama 2008). As Minkley and Mnyaka (2015) observe, the fence itself then became a convenient display area for messages of protest and hence a counter-memorial of sorts.

Lack of consultation, perceived distortion of community memories, ANC domination, and party political appropriation of local narratives of resistance have been the most frequently cited sources of dissatisfaction with postapartheid commemorative monuments, memorials, and museums among black communities. This was evident, for instance, in the case of the Emlotheni Heroes Acre in New Brighton (Hansen 2003), the Gugulethu Seven Memorial in the Cape Town township of Gugulethu (Bilbija et al. 2005), the Hector Pieterson Memorial in Orlando West (Simbao 2007), and the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication in Kliptown (Kuljan 2009).

Neglect, Abuse, and Contempt

It needs to be acknowledged, however, that not all acts of vandalism are ideologically motivated at all and that it can sometimes be difficult to determine whether observable traces of defacement signify a message of sociopolitical protest or simply an act of malicious damage or acquisitive vandalism. For instance, the Trojan Horse memorial in Athlone, outside Cape Town, installed in 2005 in commemoration of the 1985 "Trojan Horse Massacre," was found besmirched with graffiti (Marschall 2010b; Bergman n.d.). Since it was well known that some members of the community were resentful over various issues relating to the installation of this memorial and its unveiling ceremony, the graffiti could be read as an expression of protest. However, graffiti is often gang related and connected to the marking of turf. The Trojan Horse memorial may have been chosen as a target not because of its specific commemorative significance, but simply because it is a highly visible surface within the territory. Alternatively, given the fact that the erection of the Trojan Horse memorial was actually inspired by an initial act of graffiti—the scrawling of the names of the dead on a boundary wall—the later graffiti artist may have deliberately tagged the memorial in a gesture of affirmation.

By far the most frequent source of monument defacement, affecting apartheid and postapartheid monuments alike, is not overt ideologically motivated vandalism with a more or less clear political "message," but rather

the theft of bronze plaques, the pilfering of precious metal components for their scrap metal value, and similar forms of "acquisitive vandalism" (Cohen 1973; Alfred 2015; Taitz 1998). Moreover, the landscape of memory is marked by accidental damage caused by the (ab)use of commemorative markers for the utilitarian needs of the urban poor as well as the gradual, but persistent, deterioration caused by general neglect and lack of maintenance. People sit on steps and suitable ledges of monument structures; informal vendors display their merchandise on plinths and horizontal surfaces; posters and flyers are stuck on vertical planes; vagrants sleep in secluded spaces around monuments or use water features for ablutions; some passersby urinate against public monuments. The authorities are trying their best to discourage such actions through law enforcement, security patrols, fencing, or the draining of water features, but the overwhelming needs of the poor and lack of alternative services such as homeless shelters make such actions almost inevitable.

Of course, if looked at from a certain point of view such damage might be considered a form of political protest in its own right. The government's vision of an attractive and orderly public environment adorned with dignified monuments that command respect and provide inspiration to disciplined citizens often contrasts with the frequent reality of littered parks and filthy public spaces where unemployed youth and destitute citizens congregate. Monuments have always been associated with civilization, but the subaltern appropriate them and their surrounding spaces for their bodily needs and their expressions of boredom, frustration, and sometime rage. In the Cameroonian context Ndjio (2005) describes how transgressive behavior and undisciplined social practices openly performed in public spaces can represent a form of civil disobedience—a deliberate "spoiling" of the public sphere and repudiation of the government's principles of public order that represents an act of protest against state neglect and the disconnect between the lives of the political elite and the impoverished underclasses.

The irony is that the South African state parades bronze "struggle heroes" as models of identification and aspiration in front of the urban poor—the unemployed and disaffected youth whose own struggle is about daily survival and the loss of hope and aspiration. Some of the most important monuments established by the postapartheid government, which are meant to convey uplifting messages and instill lofty moral values linked to the vision of a new democratic society, have failed utterly in their mission and can now be argued to symbolize the opposite of what they were intended to represent. Some cases have been well documented; a notable example is the National Monument to the Women of South Africa at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, which remains completely inaccessible, hence underscoring the continued marginalization of women even on the symbolic level (Coombes 2003; Miller 2011; Marschall 2010a). Much has also been written about the Blood River/Ncome battlefield site near Dundee with its "reconciliation

bridge," which was meant to link the old Afrikaner monument with the new Zulu monument across the river (Girshick 2004; Marschall 2008). When the bridge remained unbuilt for more than a decade due to resistance on the Afrikaner side, the empty pylons in the water became a symbol of failed reconciliation. The bridge was eventually completed and the visitor can now read on accompanying signboards how the bridge symbolizes reconciliation and national unity, only to find that the gate of the bridge remains firmly locked on the Blood River side. Similarly, the newly built link road between the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria and the Freedom Park on the hill across from it remains closed; in this case the blockage is rumored to be on the Freedom Park side.

Shepherd (2008:118) aptly observes that "in the self-mythology of heritage it arises from 'below,' spontaneous and decentralized. In practice, it more often comes from 'above,' through official projects of memorialization and celebration." Heritage is presented as available and accessible to all, but in reality it is managed and controlled by highly bureaucratized structures and agencies. The vision of the NHRA—that communities take ownership of the heritage in their midst and play an active role in conservation and management—has not been achieved, especially among black communities. This is not least because the vision of a truly nonracial, democratic society with equal opportunities for all is still a work in progress.

Conclusions

In March 2015, inspired by the "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign, students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal defaced the bronze statue of King George V on the Howard College Campus with paint splashes and provocative graffiti slogans. Although the student body was divided on the statue issue, the Student Representative Council (SRC) officially campaigned for the removal of all symbols of the past, the transformation of the academic curriculum, and most importantly, free education ("Fees Must Fall"). While virtually all other statues defaced during this volatile period were quickly repaired and cleaned up, the King George V statue remains in its splattered state to the present day. Presumably, the university means to signal that the debate is ongoing and that the fate of this statue and other symbols of the past is still to be determined. A recent visitor from Germany, largely unaware of the "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign, believed the colorful paint splashes to be a creative artistic intervention or a light-hearted take on a grave leader of Empire. As a signifier, the traces of defacement can mean different things to different viewers. Sometimes the meaning simply remains unclear, as in the case of the postapartheid Sarah Baartmann memorial in Hankey, clandestinely splashed with white paint in April 2015 (ANA 2015). In the absence of an identifiable "message," subsequent declaration of responsibility, or evidence of agency, the intention and meaning of this act of defacement remains a matter of speculation. Such cases conveniently lend themselves to appropriation by political

leaders and societal groupings with vested interests, who will interpret the evidence and exploit it in support of their own agendas.

Commemorative monuments and similar symbolic artifacts are the loudest assertion of state power and, at the same time, its most immediate source of vulnerability and contradiction. As shown in this article, politically motivated "ideological vandalism" has manifested itself in postapartheid South Africa in the three categories of "black on white," "white on black," and "black on black." But when considering the total number of cases over the past two decades of democracy, one concludes that such incidents of defacement have been minimal on all sides of the political spectrum, despite the temporary surge of statue desecration in the wake of the "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign. Indeed, considering the public reception of the symbolic landscape as a whole, monuments and statues do not seem to be a primary canvas for the expression of ideological and sociopolitical dissent in South Africa. Ultimately, the majority simply may not attach much significance to these symbolic markers, preferring instead to utilize different platforms and methods for enacting protest and communicating messages of opposition. This observation is supported by the broader trend of neglect, abuse, and disrespect of commemorative monuments, which has remained a constant throughout the democratic period. The fact that both apartheid and postapartheid monuments are equally affected suggests that for many, a commemorative monument is not recognized as a dignified public symbol with a specific political "message," but rather as a generic and largely meaningless piece of urban infrastructure, erected and maintained by the state at high cost, while the needs of the poor are blatantly ignored.

This article, however, has deliberately excluded any discussion of financial aspects, as this would open an entirely new debate. Suffice it to say that the state has invested a lot in the installation of a new symbolic landscape (the Freedom Park development alone totals about R1 billion, or U.S.$67.3 million). The repair and replacement of defaced statues and monuments, and the employment of security guards to protect problematic monuments (as, for instance, in the case of the Cradock Four monument construction ruins), puts further pressure on the public purse. In a context in which the government is unable to deliver basic services and finance the development and maintenance of vital infrastructure, incidents of "malicious" and "acquisitive vandalism," and even overt signs of disrespect, can be interpreted as forms of sociopolitical protest which are—in the long term—perhaps more significant than an individual's act of splashing paint at a statue.

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Notes

1. This is epitomized internationally by the iconoclastic actions of violent Islamic extremists targeting UNESCO World Heritage sites, such as the Taliban's 2001 dynamiting of the giant Buddha statues at Bamiyan in Afghanistan (Janowski 2015) and the recent partial destruction of Palmyra in Syria by Islamic State (ISIS) forces, carefully staged for the media and in every way intended to shock. While ostensibly legitimate on the basis of religious iconoclasm, these acts were essentially designed to punish the West for its military intervention, with the "enemy's" anxiety over the threat of destruction and the reverberations of public outcry inadvertently enhancing the success of the mission. Some contributors to the recent statue debate in South Africa have condemned the statue vandalism by drawing parallels with these acts of Islamic radicalism but this is vastly exaggerated and hyperbolic; there is no evidence of destructive extremism in South Africa today.

2. Although the issue of renaming is somewhat outside the scope of this article, another instance should also be mentioned here that involved black as well as white protesters. In Durban in 2007–8, the controversial renaming of more than one hundred streets was strongly contested not only by white residents, but also by black supporters of the opposition Inkhata Freedom Party (IFP), who argued that most of the new street names commemorate resistance heroes and antiapartheid leaders affiliated with the ANC. Despite massive public protest and court battles, the ANC-dominated municipal council retained the new names, which as a consequence have been blacked out over and over. Since the old street signs have often been removed, some streets are now unidentifiable for the passerby, although residents, both black and white, continue referring to the streets by their old names. While they do this mostly for the sake of convenience, for some white residents the use of the original name may constitute a deliberate and active form of memory practice, recreating—in Pierre Nora's (1989) terms—a *milieu de mémoire* in the absence of a *lieu de mémoire*.

3. For an overview of these incidents, see *The Daily Vox* (2015).